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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARP

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PINS](#) [KPAO](#) [SCUL](#) [AE](#)

SUBJECT: UAE Censors Capping Their Black Pens

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: In the past several years the UAE has noticeably relaxed its censorship of print media images. Perhaps reflecting a generational change in leadership, nowhere is this change more tangible than in advertisements depicting female models. Changes in coverage of political issues are more subtle. END SUMMARY.

THE PRIVATE SECTOR MEN WITH BLACK PENS

¶2. (SBU) As in many Gulf countries, the UAE has a regime of censorship to scan printed material for content deemed inappropriate for its residents, historically using black markers to alter revealing photographs of women in magazines and newspapers. Unlike in many Gulf Countries, however, the UAE's censors are not government employees. Rather the UAE outsources the function to the main wholesale distributor of imported periodicals, Jashanmal Company. Jashanmal censors either take an artistic approach to the task by drawing in "clothing" to make a scantily-clad female appear to be more modestly dressed, or they simply cover offending images with a thick mark with a permanent black marker.

¶3. (SBU) Advertising agencies have long been aware of this practice. An infamous advertisement tailored to the UAE marketplace depicted a female model in profile with exaggerated black marker scribbles beginning near her chest and extending far beyond to convey the miraculous results that could be achieved by wearing a "Wonderbra".

¶4. (SBU) However, in recent years, censors in the UAE have become considerably less heavy-handed. An Al Arabiya satellite television channel reporter who previously worked for a UAE newspaper noted the change, telling PolOff photographs that would have been censored just a few years ago today remain untouched in the Emirates.

The Censor's View

¶5. (C) We were particularly struck by the recent appearance of fully naked female figure (in an article about a European photography exhibit) appearing in a recent edition of the Financial Times. In response to this apparent violation of long-standing practice, the Ambassador asked Mohan Jashanmal (long-time head of the eponymous company's Abu Dhabi branch) whether the rules had changed. Jashanmal explained that formal, government imposed censorship had ended during the period when Shaykh Abdullah bin Zayed (AbZ) was Minister of Information (i.e., pre-2006). AbZ had told Jashanmal that his company would have to make its own judgment about what was acceptable or not acceptable in the UAE market, and be liable for what appeared in a public venue like a store. In effect, the UAE privatized not just the function, but the underlying moral judgment, making it market based. Jashanmal was careful to note that this applied only to imported periodicals handled through retail distribution networks. Domestic periodicals presumably exercise their own editorial judgment (and The National has recently pushed to the limits by publishing a picture of a partially unclad fashion model). Periodicals delivered by subscription are a gray area (and presumably

how the FT article survived intact).

¶6. (C) COMMENT: The decline of the black pen censorship probably reflects the gradual liberalization of the UAE's public discourse especially under the post Zayed leadership. A more subtle shift is also visible in treatment of issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is less doctrinaire, at least in the quasi-official The National. It also shows the extent to which the UAE prefers a private sector mechanism, even for the enforcement of a governmental function like censorship.

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